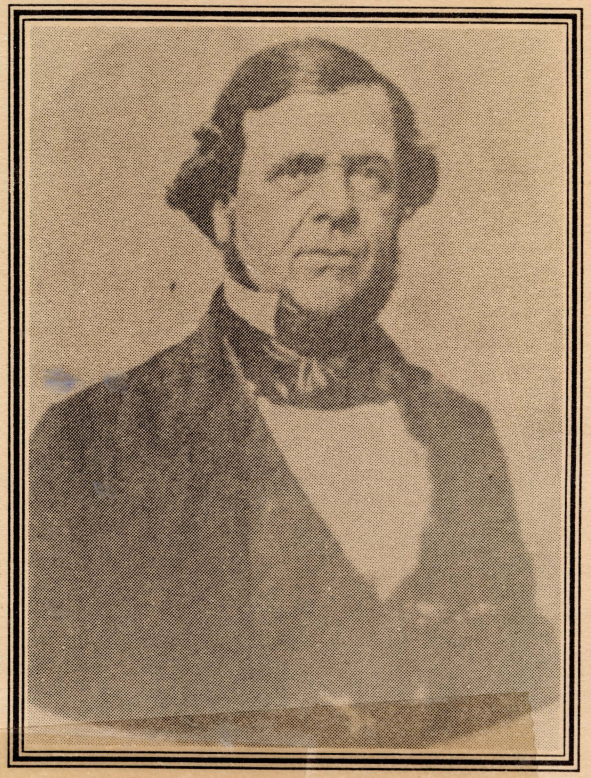
PUEBLO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CERAN ST. VRAIN

1802 - 1870



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CERAN ST. VRAIN

1802 - 1870

By Edward Broadhead

When the French Revolution brought an end to the power of the king in France, the class of the nobility which was supported by the king found itself with lives endangered and the necessity to flee its native country.

Members of the nobility fled to England, to Spain, and some to the newly established country of the United States where they sought to find a new life.

Among those coming to America was the Chevalier Pierre Charles de Hault de Lassus de Luziere, who, at the age of fifty-two, bought land from the Scioto Company, which was buying it from the Ohio Company. The family, except for the two older sons, went to Gallipolis, Ohio, in 1790 and found that the land which was advertised as ready for cultivation was still in the primitive state of forest and swamp with only a few rough log cabins yet built. The nobles were not prepared for such a life. After three years Luziere left Ohio and went to New Orleans where his childhood friend, the Baron de Carondelet was the governor of Louisiana. Although Louisiana was then Spanish, there were many Frenchmen who served the Spanish government as administrators. The baron arranged for de Lassus to obtain a grant of land in present day southwestern Missouri where he built a grist mill to furnish flour to New Orleans and to Havana. The small settlement which grew up around his holdings was called Nouvelle Bourbon.

The two sons of the Chevalier came to America in 1795. The elder, Charles Auguste, went to New Orleans where he served under Spain as lieutenant governor of Louisiana in 1799. The second son, Jacques Marcellin Ceran de Hault de Lassus, joined his father at Nouvelle Bourbon but soon went to St. Louis. In 1796 he married Marie Felicite Dubreuil. They had ten children of whom the second was Ceran, born on May 5, 1802, at the estate of his father at Spanish Lake, just north of St. Louis. Jacques had received several grants of land in Missouri due to the influence of his brother, the lieutenant governor of Louisiana. It was this brother Charles de Lassus who officiated in St. Louis, when the Spanish flag came down, was replaced by the French tricolor and then by the Flag of the United States in March 1804.

St. Louis had been established as a trading post in 1764 by Auguste Chouteau from New Orleans. It was not developed to any extent by the Spanish who controlled it from 1770 to 1804. From a position as an outpost to the Indians under the Spanish to the flourishing gateway to the West under the United States the city grew quickly into the major metropolis of the West and it became the fourth largest city of the country. The early traders were mostly French and they retained their predominant position after 1804. However, settlers from Kentucky and Virginia appeared to challenge this control.

Jacques de Lassus now added to his name de St. Vrain to distinguish himself from his brother who had been the lieutenant governor. For the French there were no more titles and no more administrative positions. Jacques now had only a brewery to support his growing family. With ten children, Jacques died in 1818 deeply in debt. Ceran was sixteen. He went to live with his affluent countryman, Bernard Pratte Sr., who operated one of the most lucrative businesses in St. Louis. Pratte frequently outfitted expeditions to trap for beaver in the Missouri River trade and also later in the Santa Fe trade. Here the youthful Ceran received some education which, though rather poor, served him well in business. He apparently learned English, for he wrote his French mother in English even though his brothers wrote to her in French. His full name was Ceran de Hault de Lassus de St. Vrain. It soon

became Americanized to Ceran St. Vrain.

By the time he was twenty-two St. Vrain had a good position with Pratte, Cabanne and Company. In 1824 he met William Becknell who had taken the first caravan to Santa Fe two years before. He was inspired to form a partnership with Francois Guerin and talked Bernard Pratte into furnishing them with trade goods. They set out to Santa Fe in November. The trip was rigorous and they arrived in March. At San Miguel on the way to Santa Fe, the Alcalde, Tomas Sena, was instructed by the governor of New Mexico not to permit St. Vrain to sell any goods until he had paid customs duties. In April 1825 the partnership was dissolved. St. Vrain paid one hundred dollars to Guerin and assumed responsibility for the total amount owed to Pratte.

St. Vrain now proceeded to use his goods to outfit trapping expeditions. He made his headquarters in Taos and formed a partnership with Paul Baillio. Taos was the center for many Americans who trapped and traded in New Mexico. Ewing Young, William Wolfskill, Joseph Walker, and Antoine Robidoux were already in Taos. In spite of the fact that St. Vrain was French, adaptable, and a Catholic, after four months in Taos he wrote to his mother that it was a miserable place. Nevertheless he stayed. He preferred to be his own boss. In the fall he led a trapping party to Utah Lake. Having sold all his goods he returned to St. Louis to get supplies. Back in Taos, he married Maria Dolores de Luna.

At this time in Mexican history it was legal for foreigners to trade in Mexico if they had a license but it was not legal for foreigners to trap for beaver in Mexico. Various methods were employed by Americans to circumvent these rulings. Several Americans took out Mexican citizenship which gave them trapping privileges. Some received licenses to trade and simply trapped on their travels. Others started out northward toward the States and then turned west to trap on the fruitful streams of western New Mexico and Arizona.

On August 29, 1826, St. Vrain and William S. Williams (Old Bill) applied to Governor Narbona for trading passports for New Mexico and Arizona. Not only were they granted but the governor sent letters to Governor Perez of

Sonora to assist the traders. In October St. Vrain and Old Bill with sixteen trappers set out for the Gila River. Near Tucson the Maricopa Indians not only traded with the party but stole from them and reported to the Mexican authorities in Tucson that they were trapping illegally. James Baird, an American who had become a Mexican citizen, considered this his territory and reported their trapping on the Gila.

When the party returned to Taos, Governor Narbona was out and was succeeded by Manuel Armijo. Hearing of Armijo's strictness, Ewing Young, who had just returned to Taos with twenty thousand dollars worth of pelts, hid them in a desert house of Cabeza de Baca. When Armijo learned this he sent troops who killed Baca and took the furs to Santa Fe. Young received permission to take the pelts to the Plaza to beat out the dust and moths, whereupon Milton Sublette, with the big muscles, seized the bales and took them into a house. When Armijo sent a cannon, Young surrendered. But by this time the pelts had disappeared. Eventually Young lost all his furs to Armijo, but strangely enough Young was not penalized either by a fine or a jail sentence.

Green River expedition, 1827

Bernard Pratte in St. Louis was displeased with the losses of his son Sylvestre who was trading in Taos. Nevertheless he agreed to outfit his son for an expedition to the mountains to recoup his losses. Sylvestre with his boyhood friend Ceran St. Vrain as clerk led thirty-six men north from Abiquiu to trap in the more northern Rockies. Among those in the party were Thomas L. Smith, Alexander Branch, William S. Williams, Milton G. Sublette, Joseph Janiar and Joseph Bisonette. The trappers fared well. By the time they reached North Park they had taken over three hundred pelts. Tragedy struck when the party lost its leader. Sylvestre Pratte became ill and died about October 1, 1827, leaving the expedition without a leader. Some of the men feared they would not receive their contract pay. Should the party break up and each set out on his own? Sound reasoning took over and they elected St. Vrain, aged twenty-five, as their leader. He

personally guaranteed their wages, which amounted to six or seven thousand dollars.

St. Vrain outfitted each man with a pack horse on which he would carry the furs he caught, the buffalo bed robes, a heavy skin sack with five six-pound traps worth twelve to sixteen dollars each in St. Louis, the traps' three-pound chains, spare springs and tools. On the rider's horse was a "possible sack" with powder, galena lead, flints, tobacco sewing materials, one or two books, dressed deerskin for moccasins. Each trapper carried on his person a skinning knife, a whetstone, pipe case, an awl holder, tomahawk, a scent container, a bullet pouch, and a powder carrier of buffalo horn. Most important was his gun which weighed ten or twelve pounds. Sometimes they carried bows and arrows, which saved ammunition and were silent.

The typical trapper had long hair, a felt hat, wool or leather clothing with fringed seams and thongs to let the rain drip off and to use to mend clothing. The upper garment was a pullover or a coat with a belt. No underclothing except a breech clout was worn. The trousers were Indian style. Leggings were thigh high. For cold there was a buffalo robe or a Hudson's Bay blanket.

When they were setting traps the men were split up into twos or threes. There were a few loners. Tom Smith was a loner. St. Vrain urged him to take fewer chances, but Smith was shot by an Indian arrow and lost a leg. Everyone thought he would die. It was the custom to leave one man with the wounded man until he died. But Smith was strong; he cut off his own leg above the ankle and cauterized it. His friends built a travois and pulled him along with them until he carved himself a wooden leg. He was thereafter known as Peg-leg Smith and continued on his rigorous life, outliving many of his contemporaries.

It was almost a year later that St. Vrain got around to writing Bernard Pratte of his son's death. St. Vrain led the party to the Green River where they spent a very severe winter. In the spring they intended to return to St. Louis by traveling down the Platte River. Hearing the Indians on that route were hostile, he turned south along the Front Range and reached Abiquiu in mid-May. At Taos

St. Vrain paid off the trappers according to their contract. One thousand six hundred and thirty-six pounds of beaver brought $5,708.50. The trip had cost Pratte a loss of five hundred dollars but Pratte honored St. Vrain's figures after sending an agent to Taos. Pratte paid St. Vrain nineteen hundred and ten dollars for about nine months work. The average pay for a top trader was one thousand dollars for eleven months. Bernard Pratte and company ceased to do business in New Mexico but it did occasionally outfit other trappers.

Getting restless to be on the road St. Vrain applied for a passport to Chihuahua on September 30, 1828. It was granted along with passports to David Waldo who had just come in from Missouri and to Richard Campbell, a veteran trapper. Their trip into Mexico was uneventful.

In response to the request of traders for protection from the Indians along the Santa Fe Trail, President Jackson sent Major Bennett Riley to guard the Santa Fe caravan from St. Louis in 1829. Captain of the trading train was Charles Bent. Waldo also was along and young William Bent was making his first trip west with his brother. The troops halted at the Arkansas crossing which was the United States boundary with Mexico. They were ordered not to enter Mexican territory. About this time Ewing Young out of Taos appeared with forty trappers. They sent for fifty-five more men and the caravan moved on to Santa Fe. St. Vrain and Kit Carson joined them on the last part of the trip. This was the first meeting of Kit Carson and William Bent who remained lifelong friends.

The traders were welcomed in Santa Fe by the governor, Jose Chavez. On this trip St. Vrain had taken with him three thousand dollars worth of goods and returned with ten thousand dollars. When the caravan returned from Santa Fe to St. Louis, Charles Bent persuaded Governor Chavez to supply them with two hundred nineteen soldiers under Colonel Viscarra to take them to the Arkansas crossing where they were to rendezvous with Major Riley.

It is interesting to note this caravan accepted ten men and six women of pure Spanish blood who were being oppressed by the Mexicans after the independence of Mexico from Spain in 1821. They sought refuge in Missouri.

Bent St. Vrain Company

In September 1830 in Taos, Ceran St. Vrain and Charles Bent negotiated an agreement of partnership which was one of the longest-lived and the most successful in the history of the Southwest. Both men were about to journey to St. Louis for more trade goods. What sense did it make for both of them to go when one could conduct the caravan and the other could keep the stores in Taos and, later, Santa Fe!

So it was decided that Bent would travel to St. Louis and St. Vrain would stay in New Mexico. The Bent St. Vrain Company was born.

Trapping was becoming less profitable and many of the trappers turned into traders, trading both with the Mexicans and the Indians. The market with the Indians became extremely profitable. One should note that until the gold-seekers arrived in 1858 the Indians were unusually friendly to whites. They seldom attacked the whites unless they were first attacked. The Indians did, however, steal anything they could take easily, especially horses.

An incident occurred, probably in 1829, which influenced the whole future of the West. Young William Bent at age nineteen took off by himself with a few men to trade with the Indians. He built a small picket post on the Arkansas River, probably at the mouth of the Hardscrabble, but some have said at the mouth of the Fountain. He was visited by a group of Cheyennes who stayed for several days and were interested in the "Little White Man." When the group left, two young braves decided to stay longer. Suddenly a band of Comanches led by Chief Bull Hump appeared at the picket post. Bent had to decide quickly whether to turn over the Cheyennes to their enemies or to risk his life by concealing them. He quickly hid the Cheyennes in his baggage. The Comanches saw the Cheyenne footprints and demanded that Bent surrender the Indians. Bent patiently explained the Cheyennes had been there but had departed. He succeeded in convincing the Comanches and no trouble ensued. When the Cheyenne people learned of Bent's action, he became a hero for the rest of his life. This bond was further cemented when a few years

later he married Owl Woman, daughter of Gray Thunder, one of the principal Cheyenne chiefs.

In 1830 the United States Army refused to send a military escort with the Santa Fe caravan, which included the St. Vrain trade goods. The sixty proprietors with some seventy wagons with goods worth one hundred and twenty thousand dollars reached the Arkansas safely and crossed into Mexico where they were escorted by Mexican troops who were to protect them from the Indians and also were to collect the import duties before the traders reached Santa Fe.

After the formation of the Bent St. Vrain Company in December 1830, Charles Bent made five round trips in 1831 traveling between St. Louis and Santa Fe. In New Mexico in 1831 St. Vrain decided to follow the example of a number of traders and take out Mexican citizenship to further his business. Taxes for imports were not as high for Mexicans as for Americans.

The year 1831 was very profitable for the new company. The value of the Santa Fe trade exceeded half a million dollars; Bent St. Vrain got a good share. And William Bent was added to the ownership.

Charles Bent for the first time decided to use oxen with his wagons instead of mules; oxen were slower and more steady and Indians didn't bother to steal them. They also could provide food in an emergency; the animals became common on the Trail.

The distance from St. Louis to Santa Fe was about one thousand miles. Gradually the Trail was shortened by taking goods up the Missouri River to Franklin, and later to Westport or Independence. This cut off some two hundred and fifty miles for the wagon trains. Ranches were established by Bent St. Vrain at Westport and at various places along the route.

The company decided to build a fort on the Arkansas near the point the Trail crossed into Mexico (present-day La Junta).

Trade with the Cheyennes increased to the point that they gave all their business to the Bent St. Vrain Company. On one trip to Missouri the Bents met the Cheyennes who had just returned from a successful raid on the Comanches. It was on this trip some time between 1830

and 1832 that two younger Bent brothers joined the company. Charles, the oldest, was thirty-three, William was twenty-three, and George was eighteen and Robert sixteen. St. Vrain was thirty. His youngest brother, Marcellin, seventeen, joined the company in 1835.

The Cheyennes were under the leadership of chiefs Yellow Wolf, Little Wolf and Wolf Chief. The chiefs recommended the company build a fort at the mouth of the Purgatoire in the region of the Big Timbers along the Arkansas, a favorite camping spot for the Cheyennes. Charles Bent and St. Vrain decided to build it about seventy miles farther up the river at the point where the Trail crossed into Mexico. This decision was a most significant one for, from this time on, the company became the practical sovereign of the whole area from the Platte River south to Taos and Santa Fe and east as far as Westport. There were many other traders but the most powerful and prosperous was the Bent St. Vrain Company. At this meeting with the Cheyennes, the Indians agreed to move their tribe from around the North Platte to the Arkansas. The Arapahos, friendly to the Cheyennes, came along. The Cheyennes honored the Bents by giving each an Indian name. Charles was White Hat, William was Little White Man, George was Little Beaver, and Robert was Green Bird (the youngest and most handsome.)

Bent's Fort, originally called Fort William because William was the most directly concerned with its erection, was built about 1832. It was also called the adobe castle on the Arkansas. At that time it was the only structure of a permanent nature between Westport and Taos.

St. Vrain made arrangements in Taos and Santa Fe to bring Mexicans to make the adobes, in which task they were skilled, and to send supplies for the building. Charles kept the wagon trains moving and William largely supervised the building process.

The great fort took shape on the American side of the Arkansas, one hundred thirty-seven feet by one hundred seventy-eight feet with walls fourteen feet high and thirty inches thick. The main gate, built of great planks sheathed with iron bands, was nine feet wide and seven feet high, wide enough to take in the largest wagons. Inside, the great court was lined with some twenty-five

rooms at two levels. Two great towers opposite one another gave fire control along all four sides of the fort. A walkway around the top had slots through which guns could be fired without great exposure of the defendants.

And the walls of this fort were always patrolled, day and night. A great cannon was placed inside, aiming out through the main gate. Due to its strength the fort was never attacked, but the vigilance was never relaxed.

Where did the money come from to build this fort? In 1832 the Bent St. Vrain caravan to Missouri carried one hundred and ninety thousand dollars worth of silver, mules and furs.

Aristocracy on the Arkansas

St. Vrain spent a great deal of time at the fort for several years. His private room on the second floor was next door to a pool room with a small bar attached. Meals were served in a great dining hall on the first floor. Here the "aristocratic St. Vrain, dressed in a frilled shirt and frock coat, entertained visitors at a table spread with silver and fine linen, garnished with goblets of claret wine." Another writer describes St. Vrain as "one of the ablest of the Santa Fe traders and a mountain man whose name was respected from the Snake River to Chihuahua. Known as 'Black Beard' to the Cheyennes, St. Vrain was described as shrewd, enterprising, impetuous, choleric, intrepid, courteous and charming."

During the construction of the fort the Mexican workers were housed in a temporary stockade. Smallpox broke out and the work was interrupted for several months. William Bent sent a messenger to warn the Cheyennes, who were planning a visit, to stay away until it was safe. They did not catch the disease, but William Bent, St. Vrain and Carson were among those badly pitted by the disease. After the epidemic Bent and St. Vrain rode out to tell the Cheyennes the danger was over. They returned with three hundred fifty lodges of Indians, two thousand and five hundred souls, to make their permanent headquarters along the Arkansas.

When the business of the Fort was at its height the

company employed about a hundred men to carry out the numerous jobs. The Fort was always stocked with an abundance of trading goods which had to be sorted and prepared for sale. The many animals must be fed and watered, from cattle to sheep, from chickens to screaming peacocks which amazed the Indians. Several hunters were employed full time to find food for this vast array. Black Charlotte kept the food cooking in the large kitchen. Her husband was a huge slave called Big Nigger whom Charles Bent had inherited. Later in 1847 William Bent freed him for fighting so forcefully to battle the Indians at Taos. No record of other slaves is found even though the Bents and St. Vrain all came from slave country.

Winter was found to be the best season for buffalo robes. Men were sent out in twos or threes to visit the various lodges to trade for robes which the Indians had prepared. One of the partners, or, in his absence, the chief clerk, would discuss with each trading group the Indians to be visited and the goods to be traded. Each trader was charged with the items which he took: all kinds of beads in many colors, red cloth, kettles, small axes, lead, blankets usually from the Navajos, butcher knives, and the much prized abalone shells from the Pacific. Alcohol was a great problem. The more unscrupulous traders would get out the alcohol first and then proceed to steal from the Indians, trading a few beads for a buffalo robe. Bent adopted a more humane system. He could not eliminate the alcohol lest the Indians refuse to trade with him. Instead he held the alcohol until the trading was finished and then left the keg with the chief who was to distribute it when he had gone. When the trader arrived at the Indian camp, he went to the chief's lodge where he was given the seat of honor to the left of the chief. After the proper smoking ceremony the Indian men and then the women traded for their wants. Each item was haggled over by the Indians. Outside the chief's tent there was an Indian guard to protect the goods from pilfering and sometimes to protect the trader. Although these guards were young Indians they felt it was an honor to serve and usually did an excellent job for both Indians and traders.

William Bent was usually in charge of the Fort, and

he was usually out in the field trading with the Indians. He seems to have had the knack of making friends with the Indians of almost all tribes. At first St. Vrain also went out on many of the trading expeditions. Charles Bent was constantly on the trail either to Taos or to St. Louis. He did stay at the Fort long enough to learn the Cheyenne language and to befriend many of the Indians.

As time went on, St. Vrain found it necessary to spend more and more time in Taos where he had a home and a store on the south side of the plaza.

The Bent St. Vrain Company was not without competition in the trade. There were many small independent traders all across the land but the company mostly ignored them or even helped to supply them. There were other forts to rival Bent's Fort. In 1834 on the North Platte River in Wyoming there arose the only other fort which could successfully compete. Bill Sublette and Robert Campbell built large Fort Laramie which threatened the Bents' monopoly of the High Plains Indians. On the South Platte four forts were built within a distance of twenty miles. Fort Vasquez was built in 1835 by Andrew Sublette and Louis Vasquez. Fort Lupton (Fort Lancaster) was built by Lancaster P. Lupton in 1837. Fort Jackson was built by Sarpy and Fraeb for the American Fur Company in 1838.

To counter this trade Bent St. Vrain built Fort St. Vrain in the same area in 1837. This fort was built by young George Bent and Marcellin St. Vrain was placed in charge. Its usefulness had passed by 1844 and the fort was deserted, leaving none on the South Platte. A sort of agreement was reached with Fort Laramie, although not followed strictly, whereby the trappers and traders from Fort Laramie would remain north of the South Platte and Bent St. Vrain would operate south of that river. In the direction south of Bent's Fort the plains were occupied by Comanches and Apaches. An attempt was made to trade with them. William Bent made a trip to their lodges in the Texas Panhandle with a mule train in 1835. They built a fort on the Canadian River called Fort Adobe Walls. However, trouble with the Indians prevented this from being a successful venture.

In the summer of 1833 the Cheyennes planned a great

battle against the Pawnees. Gray Thunder, the powerful medicine man of the Cheyennes, prepared the four sacred arrows to take into battle. These arrows had been handed down to them from their early history and were cared for by special guards at all times. Victory could be guaranteed only if the proper ceremonies were followed by Gray Thunder before an enemy Indian was killed. Most of the braves were almost uncontrollable and fought individually against an individual enemy in the battle. The Cheyennes moved north toward the Pawnees with all their families. Some scouts caught some Pawnees before the proper time and killed them. This put a jinx on the expedition. But Gray Thunder took out the arrows and conducted the ceremony in front of the enemies drawn up in battle. As the tribes faced each other Gray Thunder moved ahead to draw first blood from a Pawnee who had sat on the ground and appeared weak and eager to die. As he approached, the Pawnee jumped up and grasped the sacred arrows from Gray Thunder, who turned and fled back to his lines. The battle was a disaster for the Cheyennes. They fled to the new Fort on the Arkansas for help and the Pawnees moved back north. Shortly after the return to the Fort there occurred a great meteor shower which further frightened the Indians while William Bent stood on the walls of the Fort and watched.

Colonel Dodge was sent to try to make peace between the Cheyennes and Pawnees. He persuaded the latter to return one of the sacred arrows to Gray Thunder. The Cheyenne chief was told of the offer and he went with only his wife and two braves to the Pawnee camp. He was received with honor and the arrow was given to him. The Pawnees accompanied him back to the Fort. As they approached, the Pawnees fired off their rifles in the air. This was an Indian signal of a peaceful intention, but those around the Fort were startled and barely kept from attacking the guests. Dodge was entertained at the Fort by St. Vrain and Charles Bent. William was away trading with the Comanches in the south where he met peacefully with over two thousand Comanches.

Later in 1837 William was married in an Indian ceremony to Owl Woman, one of Gray Thunder's beautiful daughters. According to Cheyenne custom William became a

full member of the Cheyenne tribe. From this time on he became more powerful than any other chief. The Cheyennes turned to him for help and advice on every occasion. Owl Woman gave him four children, the eldest, Mary, being born in 1838 at the Fort. William was one of the few Americans of the period who remained completely faithful to his Indian wife as long as she lived.

Meanwhile, Charles, who was ten years older than William, was married in 1835 in Taos to Maria Ignacia Jaramillo, a widow of Rafael Luna, who had given her a daughter, Rumalda, now four years old. Charles set up a home in Taos, which now became his permanent headquarters. Ignacia gave him five children, of whom two died in childhood. There is no official record of Charles' marriage in the Taos church. He was not a Catholic and did not become one, nor did he become a Mexican citizen as did so many Americans in Taos, including St. Vrain. Ignacia's much younger sister, Maria Josefa Jaramillo, became the wife of Kit Carson and he built a home in Taos. Both houses are still standing today as museums.

St. Vrain, who was a Catholic and a Mexican citizen, left no record of his marriages. He unofficially married Maria Dolores de Luna in Taos and his first child, Vicente, was born there on May 10, 1827. Rumor states that he married a daughter of Charles Beaubien in 1843. However, he lived with Maria Ignacia Trujillo who gave him a son, Joseph Felix, born November 1, 1844. Felix died on the Huerfano on October 31, 1886. We do know that St. Vrain married Luisa Branch and lived with her for the later years of his life. She gave Ceran a daughter, Felicité.

In 1836 Texas won its independence from Mexico. In the flush of victory the Texans claimed all the land, much unexplored, to the Rio Grande. This would take in a large part of New Mexico. Threats of Texian invasion were rife. The government in Mexico City sent a new governor from the south, Albino Perez. He made serious attempts to bolster the military, and to do so levied taxes on individuals. The New Mexicans revolted. They had never paid taxes. They resented the governor from the south who knew next to nothing about their problems. The only taxes collected in

New Mexico came from the trade of the Americans. The Indians joined with the New Mexicans and destroyed the small army that Perez had assembled. They killed him and elected an ignorant Indian as governor. Manuel Armijo, a former governor, joined with them until the Indian governor was chosen; then he raised his own forces and drove out the Indians in the name of the Mexican government. He was rewarded by being restored to the governorship. The natives turned against all Americans because they had (unvoluntarily) supplied funds for both rebellions. Charles Bent was put in prison and a messenger raced off to Bent's Fort to notify St. Vrain. The latter started out immediately with an armed force of trappers and traders for Taos. At Raton Pass Charles appeared free and safe, probably having bribed his way out of prison.

Trading flourished on the South Platte

In July 1838 St. Vrain went to St. Louis and bought out Fort Jackson from the American Fur Company. Louis Vasquez and Andrew Sublette took a big caravan out of Independence for Fort Vasquez. They took on Jim Beckwourth who worked for them during the winter of 1839-40 and claimed to have made a fortune for them. We know that Beckwourth had seven hundred buffalo robes, but Bent St. Vrain had fifteen thousand robes that year. In 1840 Vasquez sold out to Lock and Randolph who really fared no better. They gave up and left in 1842. Lancaster Lupton held on on the South Platte and in 1841 built Fort Platte on the North Platte about a mile above the great Fort Laramie. Soon Lupton gave in and made an arrangement with the Bents. Fort Platte was sold to Pratte and Cabanne. Beckwourth was hired by the Bents to work at Fort St. Vrain. Now that the beaver were giving out a great many of the trappers turned to the traders for work, especially to Bent St. Vrain Company. The Fort took on young Richens Wootton, recently from the east, Bill Mitchell, Bill New, John Smith, Old Bill Williams and Kit Carson. These served as hunters at a dollar a day. The Mexicans who worked around the fort were paid ten to twelve dollars a month.

In 1837 a group of Cheyennes called the Bow Strings

Texans invade New Mexico

In 1841 the Texans invaded New Mexico. The Texas Legislature passed a resolution declaring the Texas boundary extended to the Rio Grande. President Sam Houston vetoed the resolution but the legislature passed it over his veto. Since the government of Texas had no money to raise an army, certain private individuals proceeded to assemble some invaders, done under the guise of a merchant caravan escorted by soldiers. They really expected no opposition in taking over New Mexico, believing they would be welcomed as freedom fighters. However, when the troops and the caravan reached the desert area of New Mexico, they lost their way and broke up into small groups. The first group was taken into custody by troops of Armijo and sent south into Mexico as prisoners. Other stragglers were treated likewise. Armijo proclaimed himself a great conqueror and was praised by the Mexican authorities. He now felt invincible, which did not help to ease the tension with the Americans in Taos and Santa Fe. In the fray Charles Bent was again arrested and put in prison. The American consul, Alvarez, appealed to Armijo who released Bent. Did Armijo fear an armed invasion from the great fort on the Arkansas? We do know that he tried to keep Americans from becoming too powerful.

It was in this period before Kearny's invasion that Armijo made some of the largest land grants ever made. In some cases he made the grants to two citizens, one naturalized American and one native Mexican of prominence, who would settle the frontier lands and thus hold them from seeping take-over by Americans. On January 8, 1841, Charles Beaubien and Guadalupe Miranda petitioned Armijo for a grant of some 1,714,764 acres of land east of the Sangre de Cristo range. This extended far enough north that two hundred and sixty-five thousand acres later came within Colorado. The petition was granted on January 11, 1841. Charles Bent was given part of this land even though he was not a Mexican citizen. When Padre Martinez of Taos learned of the grant, he raised such strong objections that the grant was withdrawn that summer. Later it was reinstated and when Beaubien died, it went to his son-in-law, Lucien Maxwell, who had married Maria de

la Luz Beaubien in 1841.

Back in 1837 Carson had taken as his wife a beautiful Indian called Waa-nibe, or Singing Wind. They had a daughter born in 1838 and when a second child was born both mother and child died. Carson was very fond of his daughter, Adaline, who proved a constant source of difficulty for him. While Carson was working at Bent's Fort in 1839 St. Vrain was paid a visit by his attractive sixteen-year-old niece, Felicite, who promptly fell in love with Carson. St. Vrain was strongly opposed to a marriage. Not that he disliked or disapproved of Carson, but he could not stand it to have a St. Vrain bring up the daughter of an Arapaho Indian. He sent his niece packing back to St. Louis. In 1841 Carson lived with a Cheyenne Indian, Making-Out-Road. They were not at all compatible and the Indian divorced him in the customary way by walking out on him. Shortly after this Carson was in Taos and found himself attracted to the sister of Ignacia Bent, Maria Josefa Jaramillo. There were problems here also. Don Francisco Jaramillo would not agree to his daughter taking care of an Arapaho, and Carson was not a Catholic.

Carson proceeded to remedy both objections. He took his daughter on the next Bent St. Vrain caravan to St. Louis, where she was to live with a relative, and he was baptised by Padre Martinez in Taos on January 28, 1842. Carson was married to Josefa on February 6, 1843, as recorded by Charles Bent in his family Bible. The two remained faithful until they both died at Fort Lyon within a month of each other in 1868. They were the parents of seven children.

The caravan to Westport in 1842 was very profitable, carrying fifty tons of buffalo robes, a ton of beaver pelts, and scores of horses, mules, sheep and oxen. More robes were started down the Platte River from Fort St. Vrain under the care of Baptiste Charbonneau. The water was too shallow for the boats and Charbonneau made camp on a wooded island which he named St. Helena to wait for help. Charbonneau was the son of Toussaint Charbonneau and his Shoshoni wife, Sacajawea, who guided the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific; the baby was taken on this journey. When he grew older William Clark took a fancy to him and had him educated in St. Louis. Prince

Paul of Wurttemberg took him to Europe for several years. When he returned Baptiste worked for Bent St. Vrain. He was sitting in his chair on the island in July 1842 when Fremont came by on his first expedition. Eventually wagons were sent to get the robes.

Boggs and Bents related

When the caravan reached Westport, the goods were loaded on river boats and the animals were sent to graze on a Bent St. Vrain farm about twelve miles south, which had been established that year. Angus Boggs was put in charge of the farm. He was the son of William Bent's sister Juliannah and Lilburn Boggs, a governor of Missouri. When Juliannah died, Lilburn married Panthea Boone, a granddaughter of Daniel Boone. Panthea's oldest son was Thomas Boggs who had already joined the company at the fort and became one of its most reliable employees. Although no blood relation, he was taken into the Bent family. He eventually married Rumalda Luna, Ignacia Bent's daughter by a previous marriage, in Taos.

Carson rode on to St. Louis but after ten days in the city he grew restless and had to return to his mountains. St. Vrain always stayed at the elegant Planters House in St. Louis. But the Bents visited their prosperous brothers and sisters. John Bent was a successful lawyer. Dorcas was married to Judge William Chiles Carr, a distinguished lawyer.

Charles A. Warfield, who knew Santa Fe and the Bents, was sent by Texas to recruit volunteers for a New Mexico invasion. The volunteers were to equip themselves but were to receive half of the booty from the invasion. Warfield was made a colonel by Texas in late 1842 and went to Missouri to seek soldiers. He made John McDaniel a captain to recruit the riff-raff and meet Warfield at Point of Rocks in New Mexico on the Santa Fe Trail on May 15, 1843. Also in February 1843 Warfield authorized Jacob Snively to raise three hundred men to capture the spring wagon trains on the Trail but to stay off United States soil. Warfield tried to recruit the trappers at Bent's Fort without success. Then he went up to the forts on the

South Platte but found only twenty-four volunteers. About this time he was joined by Rufus Sage who recorded the expedition.

Rumors of the invasion had reached Santa Fe and the mobs blamed Charles Bent. The prefect of the First District, Juan Archuleta, arrested Bent on false charges and put him in jail. They found him guilty and fined him eight hundred dollars. Bent's friends raised the money and he escaped to the Arkansas River fort. Governor Armijo ordered four hundred cavalrymen to track down Warfield. Armijo himself had wagons in this caravan threatened by Warfield. The McDaniels gang killed the wagonmaster, Chavez, and took several thousand dollars in coins.

Captain Philip St. George Cooke, the American commander, was ordered with three hundred dragoons to protect the caravan coming from Missouri. He was ordered to stop his troops at the crossing of the Arkansas and not to enter Mexico. About this time Charles Bent and St. Vrain decided to float some robes down the Arkansas. St. Vrain went with the flotilla and Bent led a wagon train.

Warfield finally assembled about twenty-one men near Rabbit Ears and marched toward Mora. Scouts spotted sixty of Armijo's cavalry and in the darkness killed five, wounded four, and captured eighteen with their equipment, including seventy-two horses and mules. A Mexican counterattack took all but three horses and the twenty-one Texans fled across Raton Pass where the group broke up. Sage returned to Fort Lupton on the South Platte and Warfield went down the Arkansas. Warfield found Snively and one hundred and eighty men some forty miles from the crossing. Here Carson told him that Armijo was leading several hundred men east to meet the caravan.

St. Vrain's boats were stranded in the shallow Arkansas and he sent word to Bent who sent wagons to get the robes. Bent continued east and met the United States troops under Cooke at Walnut Creek. On June 22 St. Vrain appeared, bringing news that the Texans had defeated Armijo's advance guard under Venture Lobato and killed twenty or more of the Pueblo Taos Indians. The westbound caravan had twenty-four American wagons and thirty-two Mexican wagons with one hundred forty armed men. They

heard of Lobato's defeat and begged Cooke to continue with his escort on to Santa Fe. He refused. Then the traders offered Carson three hundred dollars to go to New Mexico for more troops. He found Taos in chaos. The Mexicans had looted Beaubien's store. Carson set out for Bent's Fort and met Lucien Maxwell, probably at Sangre de Cristo Pass. Carson learned of Fremont's second expedition which had reached Fort St. Vrain on July 4. Fremont found no supplies there for his journey and had sent Lucien Maxwell to Taos to get supplies and meet him at Pueblo on July 14. Maxwell went on to Taos and Carson to Bent's Fort where William Bent told him that Cooke had decided the Texans had crossed into United States territory. Cooke forced the Texans to surrender to him and he confiscated their guns. This was the end of the Texas invasion.

Carson then rode up the Arkansas and found Fremont at Pueblo. Afraid that Maxwell would be unable to get supplies at Taos, Fremont sent Carson back to Bent's Fort for supplies and told Carson to take them across country and to meet him at Fort St. Vrain. Carson went with Fremont and was gone from home for more than a year.

On August 26, 1843, in St. Louis, St. Vrain and Charles Bent signed a contract to provision Cooke's troops who were to serve as an escort for the trade caravans. And for the first time Cooke was told to go on to Santa Fe as an escort if the Mexicans asked him. The weather was very rainy and the progress of the wagon train was slow. By September 17 no Mexican escort had left Santa Fe so Bent and St. Vrain asked Cooke to decide whether he was going on to Santa Fe. The Mexican traders asked Cooke to proceed. He agreed and sent St. Vrain ahead to Santa Fe to buy enough food for his troops for the winter which he would spend at Bent's Fort.

But the Mexican escort troops appeared and Cooke canceled his food orders to St. Vrain, who was already in Santa Fe purchasing the supplies. It took the United States Army more than four years to pay for these supplies which Cooke had turned down so late.

Land grants

Governor Armijo struggled to keep New Mexico from

falling into the hands of the Americans. Not only did he levy taxes on Americans, which were not levied on Mexicans, he made large grants of land in the Mexican tradition to try to maintain his control over the frontier areas. Back in 1841 he had made the Beaubien and Miranda Grant. Now in December 1843 he made another large grant to Narciso Beaubien and Stephen Lee. Since the earlier grant was to Charles Beaubien, it would not seem proper to make another grant to the same man, so it was made in the name of Charles' teen-age son, Narciso. Lee was married to the sister of Beaubien's wife. This grant was 1,038,195 acres north of Taos and in the San Luis Valley -- the Sangre de Cristo grant, the one which William Gilpin later purchased for so little.

Also in December 1843 Cornelio Vigil, an uncle of Ignacia Bent, and St. Vrain petitioned Armijo for the largest grant ever made, 4,096,000 acres. The petition was made on December 8 and was granted the next day. The grantees were placed in possession on January 2, 1844. This included the very sparsely inhabited valleys of the Greenhorn, Huerfano, Apishapa, Cucharas and Purgatoire rivers. On March 11, 1844, Vigil and St. Vrain gave to Charles Bent a one-sixth interest in this grant. Even Armijo did not disdain to accept a portion of the grant for himself. About the same time the Gervacio Nolan Grant was made of about a half million acres taking in the watershed of the St. Charles River. Nolan was a native of Canada, under the British sovereign, who went to New Mexico about 1824. He was a trapper and trader who could not read or write and quite possibly never set foot on the land he was granted. However, his heirs did receive recognition of the claims. The lands received under Spanish and Mexican customs were given under the condition that they be settled and used productively within a period of twelve years, otherwise the land reverted to the government. The grantees were all slow to put settlers on their lands.

The lack of settlement was partly due to the growing enmity between the Mexicans and the Americans, especially in Santa Fe and Taos. Back on August 7, 1843, Santa Ana, the president of Mexico, had closed all the custom houses in Taos, El Paso and Chihuahua to keep out the Americans.

But by March 31, 1844, because of the dissatisfaction of the Mexicans in being denied their trade goods, Santa Ana again opened the custom houses but forbade any Americans to carry on retail trade in Santa Fe or Taos. Santa Ana's laws were not obeyed in New Mexico in regard to trade restrictions.

The year 1844 proved to be one of the most profitable in history for the traders. Sam Owens (for whom the Owens Valley in California was named) set out from Independence with a large caravan of thirty-four wagons, two dearborns and sixty men, one of whom was young Bill Boggs, the second son of Panthea and Lilburn Boggs. His parents agreed to let him go to Bent's Fort where his brother Tom worked. For this caravan Owens was captain and Nick Gentry was wagon master. Gentry hired Bill to drive one of his two wagons which were loaded with contraband tobacco. There were several trains in this caravan. William Bent started first, Owens was second, then one led by Albert Speyer, Connelly and Glasgow, one led by Charles Bent and another by St. Vrain. They met very bad weather on the Cimarron and lost much of the stock from freezing to death. Somehow Charles Bent and St. Vrain missed the blizzard. When they reached Santa Fe the new governor, Mariano Martinez de Lajanza, let the caravan into Santa Fe in return for a bribe. Charles Bent held back his caravan until he went ahead to Santa Fe to see the governor and make arrangements, leaving young George Bent in charge of the caravan. For the winter young Bill Boggs went to Bent's Fort and found a happy reunion with his brother Tom. To initiate Bill into the business of trading, William Bent took him on a trip to the Cheyennes in the Big Timbers. Bent came down with diphtheria and was doctored by the medicine men.

War with Mexico

On March 1, 1845, President Tyler signed into law a joint resolution of Congress admitting Texas into the Union as a State. Three days later James K. Polk became president. Polk sent some "peaceful" expeditions to survey the boundaries of Texas. Stephen Watts Kearny and Philip St. George Cooke went up the Arkansas. When they

arrived at Bent's Fort, the cannon boomed and Charles Bent and St. Vrain rode out to meet the guests. Although Cooke had traveled much of the territory and knew the Bents well, it was his first visit to the great fort. He was duly impressed. Bent told Kearny about New Mexico. Fremont also appeared at Bent's Fort on his way to "survey California." He sought to get Carson and Owens to accompany him on his expedition, but these men were building a ranch on the Little Cimarron where they decided they would like to settle down and raise their families. In 1843 Maxwell had built a settlement on Rayado Creek and in the spring of 1844 Bent St. Vrain sent Tom Boggs and John Hatcher to establish a ranch nearby on Fonil Creek. After two weeks at the Fort, Fremont started up the Arkansas and Lieutenant J. W. Abert led an expedition to the Texas panhandle with Greenwood and Hatcher as guides. St. Vrain and William Bent followed Abert to the Canadian in the panhandle and built an adobe trading post. Up until this time they had used only tepees and log cabins in the panhandle because it was not United States territory. Now that it was American land they built an adobe post for trade with the Comanches.

In the fall of 1845 young Francis Preston Blair, twenty-four, arrived at Bent's Fort to seek to regain his health. He was a lawyer and a brother of the well-known Montgomery Blair in St. Louis. He recovered quickly and became a close friend of George Bent, thirty-four. In the spring of 1846 the two young men took a party to Taos, crossing the mountains in severely cold weather. Blair was surprised and shocked to see a Mexican riding near him topple off his horse, frozen to death. They stopped in Taos to see George's wife and children and then set out for Santa Fe. They left Taos seething with a conflict between Padre Martinez and Charles Bent. Martinez objected to Bent's receiving a portion of the great grants which had just been given to St. Vrain. It came near to boiling when the Utes raided flocks of Martinez and stole eight thousand sheep and four hundred horses. Martinez laid the blame on Bent, declaring he had sold the guns to the Utes, probably at Pueblo and Hardscrabble. Actually the Bents had no interest in either settlement. But Martinez created a riot in Taos and had troops sent to the

rise up and take the baby to the river to bathe it.

On July 31, 1846, Kearny issued a proclamation to the citizens of New Mexico promising to respect the rights of all who did not resist. He ordered Eugene Leitensdorfer and Lieutenant de Courcy to ride ahead with twenty dragoons and a flag of truce. James Magoffin, Susan's brother-in-law, arrived with orders from President Polk. He was to try to subvert Armijo and his officers, taking an escort of twelve dragoons to Santa Fe. Kearny sent for Captain Cooke to take a letter to Armijo stating that he was annexing all of New Mexico east of the Rio Grande. William Bent was summoned by Kearny, was told the invasion would leave on August 2, and was told to form a spy group to reconnoiter for information on the plans of the Mexicans. Bent was insulted at the fee he was offered, after the Army had ruined the company's business, stripped his stores and glutted his repair shops. He stormed out, telling Kearny that if he wanted his help, he could damned well pay what it was worth. Next day a compromise was reached and Bent set out with George, Frank Blair and Estes, a Taos innkeeper. Marcellin St. Vrain was left in charge of the Fort.

Kearny marched up the Timpas, across Raton Pass and south to Las Vegas. There was no resistance and Kearny read the citizens of Las Vegas a proclamation of annexation.

On August 9 spies sent out from Santa Fe returned to report that the Americans were approaching with five thousand troops. On August 12 Cooke was housed in the Palace of the Governor. On August 18 Kearny entered Santa Fe without firing a shot. Armijo fled south to Chihuahua, not even resting at his home in Albuquerque.

On August 17 Charles Bent reached the Fort from Missouri. St. Vrain and Folger arrived at Westport to bring in the annual fall caravan. Bent rode to Taos and then to Santa Fe where Kearny was setting up a civil government. Doniphan, a skilled lawyer, worked on a constitution and code of laws for the new American territory. Frank Blair, a lawyer, assisted, and David Waldo translated the documents into Spanish. Bent became a chief adviser. Kearny took half his troops and marched around the nearby towns placating the priests and calling

on Indian delegations. Returning to Santa Fe he found all was well. Sterling Price was coming down the Cimarron cut-off with reinforcements.

General Stephen Watts Kearny was a man of ambition and determination. His orders from Washington were rather indefinite and left him a choice as to his actions after the capture of Santa Fe. He decided to press on to California. Before leaving Kearny announced on September 22 a list of civil officials for New Mexico.

Charles Bent was governor, Donaciano Vigil (a relative of Ignacia Bent) was lieutenant governor, Eugene Leitensdorfer was auditor, Frank Blair was attorney-general, Charles Beaubien was judge of the superior court along with Joab Houghton. Charles Bent sent a long letter to Secretary of State James Buchanan outlining New Mexico's needs and another letter to Senator Benton of Missouri suggesting the following appointees: Surveyor-general, Meriwether Lewis Clark (a personal friend); land commissioners, Ceran St. Vrain, David Waldo and Manuel Alvarez; Head Indian agent, George Bent, and subagents to Indians: Jared Folger, Tom Boggs and John Hatcher. None of his suggestions was followed.

Ball in Governor's Palace

There was a great ball at the governor's palace on September 24 honoring Kearny before his departure the next day. William Bent, now an honorary colonel as the result of his services to the Army, did not attend. He returned to the Fort and stopped on the way to see about the farms which he was establishing on the Vermejo, the Ponil and the Little Cimarron. These had all been used by the Army as the troops passed by. Hatcher was sent to the upper Purgatoire to establish a farm so he had brought with him from Taos some wagons, oxen and fifteen or sixteen Mexicans. They built a two-mile irrigation ditch.

An Indian Agency of the Upper Platte and Arkansas was created in April 1846 and its headquarters was located at the Fort. Tom Fitzpatrick was placed in charge but he did not learn of his appointment until he arrived at the Fort on October 14 from the West. Carson was taking dispatches from California to Washington when he met Kearny on the

way west. Kearny ordered him to turn over the dispatches to Fitzpatrick and he was ordered to guide the Army of Kearny on the Gila route to California. Carson almost deserted since he would not get to see Josefa in Taos; upon the urging of Lucien Maxwell Carson went with Kearny.

St. Vrain and Folger arrived at the Fort late in October with the caravan from Westport. With them came Lewis Garrard, seventeen, who was taking the trip west as a lark. He wrote down his experiences over a two-year period. He came to know St. Vrain and William Bent quite well. His record of his experiences forms one of the most fascinating books written about this tragic period. Upon arrival at the Fort William Bent liked the boy and let him go with John Smith to pay a visit to the Cheyennes at Big Timbers. Here he lived in a tepee and learned the customs of the Indians as an honored guest -- and wrote most interestingly about them.

The Navajos again were raiding the Rio Grande Valley. Kearny sent back word to Doniphan to settle this problem before he marched south. Doniphan sent Major Gilpin who marched several hundred miles and made peace with the Indians. Gilpin took his one hundred eighty men north through Abiquiu across the mountains to the Canyon de Chelly and as far as the site of Gallup.

On October 3, 1846, Colonel Sterling Price and the Missouri Regiment arrived with the Mormon Battalion. By the time the Mormons reached Bent's Fort they were tired and the women wanted to stop. Some of the Mormons rode up the Arkansas to Pueblo where there were forty-three brethren, including twenty-four men and five negro slaves. These men had started out on the Oregon Trail and turned south along the Front Range to Pueblo where they were welcomed. When Kearny was ordered to take over the Mormon Battalion, he refused to take along any of the women. He sent them north to Pueblo under Captain James Brown. Eventually some two hundred and seventy-five Mormons spent that winter in log cabins across the Arkansas River from the Pueblo settlement.

On October 20 Charles Bent, now the governor, sent a letter to Kearny stating that a rebellion was brewing. He named the conspirators as Diego Archuleta, Augustin Duran, the priest Gallegos, and the Armijos of Albuquerque. In

Santa Fe the guards were doubled. But on October 26, Doniphan turned over the command of the city to Sterling Price and started his invasion southward.

We have a report that Charles Bent sent to Washington on November 10. He described the tribes of Indians, their numbers and their characteristics. He recommended a series of military forts along the Arkansas and a major fort near El Paso with minor forts scattered across New Mexico. He urged that members of each tribe be invited to Washington. He also worried about the Pueblo Indians, especially in Taos. There was no reply from Washington and his advice was ignored. On November 30 he again wrote to Senator Benton stating that New Mexico needed roads, schools, Indian agents, land surveys and mining assistance. There were no jails, they needed about two hundred dragoons permanently and two companies of artillery and eight hundred infantrymen to quell the Indians, to guard against Mexican bandits and forestall revolution.

Meanwhile the disgruntled Mexicans and the Indians, especially of the Taos Pueblo, planned for a revolution in mid-December. It was postponed until Christmas and Charles Bent redoubled his vigilance. Word of Doniphan's victory at El Brazito just north of El Paso encouraged Bent and he released Clark's artillery to move south to join Doniphan.

Taos smoldered. Attorney James White, Sheriff Stephen Lee and Prefect Cornelio Vigil came to Santa Fe to talk with Bent. On January 14 Bent set out alone for Taos against the advice of his friends. The boys, Pablo Jaramillo, brother of his wife Ignacia, and Narciso Beaubien, son of Charles Beaubien, went along. On January 19, 1847, Lee and Vigil were murdered in the street. Also killed were Attorney James Leal, Narciso Beaubien and Pablo Jaramillo. The rebels went to Bent's home. He tried to talk to them but to no avail. The rebels broke into his house and scalped him in front of his wife and children. The latter, being Mexican, were allowed to escape to a friend's home.

Charles Towne took word of the slayings to Santa Fe the next day. The rebels sent invitations to Santa Fe hoping to get recruits. By this time they had fifteen hundred men under General Tafoya at Taos. Colonel Price

asked St. Vrain to raise a company of mountain men. St. Vrain found sixty-five volunteers and was made captain with Metcalf as his lieutenant. Price had only a total of three hundred and fifty-three men and only the mountain men were mounted. On the twenty-third, Price moved north toward Taos with St. Vrain covering the baggage. At La Canada the next day some Mexicans tried to cut in behind Price to capture the ammunition wagons. St. Vrain ordered an attack and the Mexicans fled up the canyon. The rebels had lost Tafoya, thirty-six dead and forty-five prisoners. Price lost only two killed and seven wounded. On January 28 reinforcements arrived under Captain Burgwin and Lieutenant Wilson with a six-pound cannon. Now Price with four hundred and eighty men marched up the Rio Grande canyon and found the rebels had regrouped at Embudo, the narrowest spot in the canyon. Price ordered a three-way attack; Burgwin in the center, one company up the eastern hillside and St. Vrain up the western hillside. All rebel fronts buckled and fled to Taos. On February 3 Price entered Taos at noon unopposed. The Pueblo Indians still held their pueblo. Price marched on the pueblo but withdrew at the end of the day. He was joined by Dick Wootton and more mountain men. They had left the Fort when they learned of the death of Charles Bent.

Back on January 19 when the murders took place in Taos, Charles Autobees mounted his horse and rode twelve miles north to warn the Americans who had settled around Turley's mill at Arroyo Hondo. Without stopping he shouted a warning to the Americans to flee. Turley could not believe the Mexicans would harm him who had lived among them for more than twenty years. The rebels came and besieged the mill which gave out after two days; all lost their lives except three who escaped. John Albert slipped away in the darkness in the middle of winter without even a coat and ran north, avoiding settlements. Albert had to travel two hundred and forty miles to find succor. He managed to kill a deer and used the skin to help protect himself. He passed the Greenhorn settlement and headed for Pueblo (where a trading fort had been built in 1842). In the darkness he missed the fort and found himself in the Mormon town where he was cordially received, warmed and given food.

A messenger was sent down the river to find William Bent. When he arrived at the Fort, Autobees already had arrived with the news that Charles Bent was dead. Louis Simonds assumed the task of riding down to Big Timbers where William had gone to visit the Cheyennes. When Simonds reached the Big Timbers the Indians placed food before him and went to William's lodge for him. Simonds told his story to the Indians. The entire tribe voted to go to Taos and wipe out the Pueblos and the Mexicans. How had they dared to scalp their Charles! William was devastated to lose his older brother but told the Cheyennes not to get mixed up in the white men's problems. The next day he rode to the Fort alone with Lewis Garrard who reported that he spoke scarcely a word on the entire forty-mile trip. Those at the Fort had rumors that Santa Fe had fallen and that the Mexicans were marching on the Fort.

Word came to the Fort that John Albert was at Pueblo. Swiftly William rode the seventy miles to Pueblo. When he reached the fort there he discovered that all the Mexicans had been imprisoned in one room. The fifteen Mexicans were brought before William. Lavender writes that "If he had so much as nodded, the mountain men would have instantly killed all fifteen." Albert told William about the fight at Turley's mill but knew very little more about the situation in Taos. William decided not to go to Taos for revenge but to return to his Fort. He placed William Bransford in charge of the men who were going to Taos.

The Pueblo Indians and their Mexican friends took refuge in the church at the (Taos) pueblo. After a long fight many of the Indians fled to the surrounding fields, hoping to reach the greater safety of the mountains. Many individual battles raged with St. Vrain in the midst of them. Once, riding with Wootton, St. Vrain saw on the ground an Indian whom he knew was one of the leaders of the revolt. He stopped to examine the body when the Indian rose up and seized St. Vrain by the throat and tried to stab him with an arrow. Wootton managed to intervene and closed the fight with a tomahawk blow to the Indian.

In Taos, Frank Blair now set into motion the new judicial system. Bransford's party from Bent's Fort learned upon reaching the Vermejo Creek ranch that the

rebels had been defeated. Bransford sent Maxwell and most of the men to Taos and he took some ten or eleven Frenchmen to round up the cattle that had been dispersed by the rebel raid. He went on to Ponil where it was all quiet.

The trial at Taos didn't take long

In Taos the court was set up with the judges being Joab Houghton, a close friend of Charles Bent, and Charles Beaubien, whose son Narciso had been killed. George Bent was foreman of the jury and Elliott Lee, a relative of the slain sheriff, was one of the veniremen. Robert Fisher, a long-time Bent trader, was foreman of a petit jury. Jurymen were Lucien Maxwell, a brother-in-law of the slain Narciso Beaubien, and Asa Estes, Antoine LeRoux, Charles Towne and Charles Autobees, all friends of the Bents. St. Vrain was the interpreter. The prosecuting attorney was Frank Blair. Witnesses to the murder of Charles Bent were his wife, Ignacia, her sister, Josefa, and Ignacia's daughter, Rumalda Luna. The court was in session for fifteen days. Fifteen men were sentenced to death and the executions were promptly carried out.

Was this a completely one-sided court? Most certainly. But consider what Lavender says, "Well, in Taos there was no such thing as impartiality. If associates and relatives of the murdered did not sit on the juries, then associates and relatives of the murderers would have."

The rebellion was over but problems continued to harass the frontier. The plains Indians, aware the Americans were at war with Mexico, decided this was a good time to drive them out. The Bent St. Vrain wagon train was late starting east in 1847 because the traders from the Platte area did not reach the Fort until a late date. The Missouri-bound train left on May 4 and included St. Vrain, Dick Green, the slave of Charles who had fought at Taos so valiantly as a volunteer, and his black wife Charlotte, cook at the Fort. He was set free by William and George Bent and was going to the east. William Tharp joined the train at Big Timbers with his own wagons.

John Smith, who had helped to build Fort Mann just west of present Dodge City, was heading east for safety.

The Comanches struck the train at Walnut Creek. Tharp and McGuire were killed, and forty oxen, sixty horses and mules were lost. St. Vrain came along a few days later with Asa Estes and Frank Blair, who returned to St. Louis, was married and never came west again. Tom Fitzpatrick, bound for his new post as Indian Agent at Bent's Fort, left Leavenworth on June 8 with Lieutenant John Love's dragoons escorting three hundred fifty thousand dollars cash to pay the troops at Santa Fe. At Pawnee Creek the Comanches struck again, killed five soldiers and stole one hundred fifty head of stock. All the Indians were on the warpath -- Comanches, Kiowas, Pawnees, Navajos, Apaches, Utes and Arapahos. Only the South Cheyennes kept the peace, because of William Bent's influence.

When St. Vrain reached St. Louis he was consulted about the situation. He offered to sell Bent's Fort for sixteen thousand dollars to the Army in a letter dated July 21, 1847, to Lt. Col. Mackay of the quartermaster's office in St. Louis. He left no evidence that he had consulted with William Bent on this offer. The Army offered twelve thousand dollars. The sale was not consummated.

Back at the Fort, in 1847 William Bent's Cheyenne wife died giving birth to her fourth child, Julia. Lavender states Julia was the daughter of William's second wife, Yellow Woman, Owl Woman's younger sister. However, George Bent, Julia's brother, states that the child of Yellow Woman was a brother, Charles.

Up on the Purgatoire, not far from Raton Pass, the Utes drove Hatcher away from the new Bent's Ranch. Tom Fitzpatrick arrived at the Fort but the gifts for the Indians had not arrived and William had to provide a few of his own treats for them. George Bent (William's younger brother) arrived from Taos, took sick and died on October 23 at the Fort. He was thirty-three. Business was good and Bent St. Vrain opened two new stores in Santa Fe, one on the plaza and the other at No. 1 Main Street.

In November, Lt. Col. William Gilpin reached the Fort with two companies of the Indian Battalion, organized by Missouri at the request of the federal government and under his command. His goal was to put an end to the growing Indian unrest and their attacks on the whites.

Gilpin asked for supplies at the Fort and although William Bent was willing, St. Vrain came along with a resounding "No!" He had experienced other occasions when the army commander in the field had ordered supplies and payment had been denied in Washington, sometimes for years. St. Vrain demanded a requisition from Washington for the supplies. It was not forthcoming. Perhaps this disagreement between St. Vrain and Bent festered a bit. Gilpin's troops moved up the Arkansas to Pueblo for the winter.

In March 1848 the Utes and Apaches attacked Lucien Maxwell and fourteen others on Manco Burro Pass, just east of Raton Pass. Charles Towne was killed and Maxwell and Elliott Lee were wounded. They lost one hundred horses. Dick Wootton came along to rescue them as they were making their way on foot down the New Mexico side of the Pass. Troops in New Mexico were sent to punish the Utes. Robert Fisher and Old Bill Williams were the scouts. Gilpin ranged along the Canadian, the Cimarron and the Arkansas and killed two hundred and fifty Pawnees, Comanches, Prairie Apaches and Osages. Gilpin wrote on August 1, 1848, that there was need of forts to control the Indians. He recommended the forts be placed along the Arkansas and that the Army buy Bent's Fort. That summer a Bent St. Vrain caravan was attacked by the Comanches but was fought off.

Both St. Vrain and William Bent in St. Louis that summer heard rumors of a transcontinental railroad. St. Louis businessmen were sending an expedition to find a route across the mountains that would be open all year. Fremont was to lead the party. When Fremont reached Pueblo he looked for a guide to find such a route. Both Hatcher and Wootton refused to lead Fremont across the mountains during the winter which was very severe. Old Bill Williams, now sixty-one, agreed but warned Fremont that it was extremely dangerous.

Bent tried to reopen his fort at Adobe Walls on the Canadian River. He sent Lucien Maxwell, John Smith, Robert Fisher, Murray and two Mexicans. The Apaches killed the herders and ran off all the animals except two mules. The would-be traders buried their goods, put the ammunition and camp gear on the two mules and walked back one hundred and seventy five miles to the Fort. The

Kiowas unsuccessfully attacked them on the way. The Comanches came to the Fort to ask for trade goods. The Indians were so hostile that the traders dared not go out to the Indian villages. The Comanches were so arrogant that those in the Fort could admit only two or three Indians at a time. Finally the traders had to make a hole in the wall to trade. The Comanches fired through the hole. Eventually an old chief calmed the braves and they left. Bent tried again in the spring of 1849 to trade with the Comanches but they killed his stock.

More trouble arose at the Fort. Marcellin St. Vrain, who had worked for the company for several years, got into a wrestling match with an Indian and accidentally killed him. Ceran and William advised Marcellin to go back to Missouri. This he did and never returned. He left two Indian wives. Sioux Red, whom he had married at Fort St. Vrain, bore him two sons and a daughter. Ceran soon took her to Mora where for several years she kept watch on a hill for Marcellin's return. Finally she succumbed to the advances of William Bransford, became a Catholic, bore him seven children and died in Trinidad about 1885 or 1886. Marcellin's other wife was a Pawnee, six feet tall, and mother of his two sons. She eventually moved to Pueblo and dropped out of sight.

The company is dissolved

St. Vrain and Bent finally decided to dissolve the Bent St. Vrain Company. Charles Bent, the peacemaker in the company, was no longer around. St. Vrain's interests were centering in New Mexico. He, Charles and George had married Mexicans, but William married a Cheyenne and remained close to the tribe. Early in 1849 St. Vrain rode from Taos to the Fort and brought news of Fremont's disastrous fourth expedition. The winter had conquered. Eleven men had died, all the mules and equipment were lost. Fremont blamed Old Bill Williams but did not follow his advice. Old Bill lost his life the next spring when he went north to the mountains to retrieve the lost instruments. A Ute Indian shot him.

The company ceased to exist, a company which had lasted years longer than any other on record, and had

brought great profits to its owners. St. Vrain took the stores in Taos and Santa Fe and William Bent kept the Fort. But what was it to him now? He had lost three brothers and a wife and was practically alone. It is quite possible that the Army would have bought the Fort but Bent felt the Army offered him only a pittance. The Army had paid him nothing for the use of the Fort as a base for Kearny's army in 1846, or as a base for the Indian agency, or for the loss of his business. The Army did build Fort Kearny on the Platte and purchased Fort Laramie in Wyoming for four thousand dollars. Soon it would build Fort Union in New Mexico.

In the spring of 1849 gold was discovered in California. More than ten thousand wagons traveled the Oregon Trail. Some three thousand people went up the Arkansas past the Fort and on to Pueblo or Santa Fe. Cholera struck the West, affecting both emigrants and Indians. It wiped out more than half the Southern Cheyennes, including Gray Thunder's widow, the grandmother of Bent's children.

All Indians were restless and belligerent.

Bent gathered together all the people at the Fort, loaded all of value which could be carried on his wagons and made camp some five miles down the river. He rode back alone and set fire to the powder magazine. The building was not entirely destroyed and served for several decades as a stage stop and a corral. Bent proceeded down the Arkansas to build a U-shaped stockade in the Big Timbers.

Here, close to his Cheyennes, he found business was very good. Bent and Carson took horses and mules north to the Platte to trade on the Oregon Trail. Carson and Josefa had their first child, named Charles for his dead friend. Three years later they had a second child whom they named William. Business was so good on the Platte that Bent decided to reopen Fort St. Vrain which became a very active trading post.

Tom Fitzpatrick, the new Indian Agent, took his recommendations to Washington for a great Indian Council to meet in 1849. The government postponed the Council until 1850. Finally the Council was set for September 1851 at Fort Laramie. More than ten thousand Indians

arrived: Cheyennes, Arapahos, Comanches, Apaches, Kiowas, Oglala and Brule Sioux, and Shoshonis. The military precision of the Shoshonis amazed the American troops. The gifts for the Indians did not arrive on September 20.

Back at Big Timbers Bent decided to build a great fort of stone, not adobe. He continued to take contracts to haul freight from Westport to Santa Fe. When he returned from the East in 1853 he brought to the new Fort ready-made doors, window frames and glass. He dropped these off with Yellow Woman and his children at Big Timbers and went on to Santa Fe. Here he saw St. Vrain was busy furnishing materials for the new Territorial Capitol. St. Vrain also was running for lieutenant governor but was not elected.

Bent took his children Mary, Robert and George to the home of Albert Boone in Westport to be educated. Later they went to the home of Bent's sister, Dorcas Bent Carr in St. Louis. Charles' son Alfredo and George's son Elfego were in St. Louis. Charles' daughters Teresina and Estafina went to be educated at the Loretto Convent in Santa Fe.

In 1853 Bent sent word to the Indians to come to the new Fort to receive their annuities now furnished by the government. Hundreds of lodges were set up surrounding the Fort and Bent distributed the food and gifts. The Indians were no longer able to provide for themselves since their lands were seized and the buffalo were gone. California, in the throes of the gold rush, was in great need of food and supplies. Great herds of sheep were driven from New Mexico to California and brought huge profits to Carson, Maxwell, Wootton and Hatcher. Wootton drove fourteen thousand sheep to California and returned with forty thousand dollars profit.

In the fall of 1853 Fremont again tried to find a good rail route across the mountains. He took Cochetopa Pass. About this same time the government hired John Gunnison to seek a pass; Gunnison and six men were killed by the Utes in Utah.

Also in 1853, St. Vrain decided it was time to get settlers on his grant. If the twelve-year time limit were to be accepted by the United States government, he must make use of his grant soon. He found several settlers

available. Charles Autobees had built himself a ranch on the Rio Colorado after his former employer Simeon Turley had been murdered in 1847. St. Vrain asked Autobees to set up a ranch on the lower Huerfano. He did in 1853 and remained until his death in 1882. At the same time Wootton and Joseph Doyle built fortified houses at the mouth of the Huerfano. Farther up the river there were other settlers in the next few years. Doyle moved sixteen miles up the Huerfano and established his famous ranch which became very profitable. William Kronig, who had married Teresita Suaso's youngest daughter, Rafaelita, had a ranch near Autobees.

Meanwhile, the Indians grew wilder with their land seized and the means of getting food gone with the buffalo. In 1854 the Utes, formerly one of the friendliest tribes, turned hostile. On the pretext of a friendly trading group they were permitted to enter the Fort at Pueblo on Christmas Eve 1854. They killed all the occupants except two boys and a young woman taken captive. They were driven off the ranch of Marcelino Baca at Pueblo but stole all his horses. They attacked the fortified houses at the mouth of the Huerfano but were frightened away by a show of force by Wootton and his friends. Governor Meriwether of New Mexico called up six companies of volunteers and put St. Vrain in charge; they defeated the Utes at Poncha Pass. The trouble spread to the Sioux and the Northern Cheyennes. The new Indian Agent, Robert C. Miler, thirty-two, arrived at Bent's New Fort with the annuity train. He ordered Bent to store the goods in the Fort and withhold them to punish the Indians. Bent refused but finally agreed to move out and rent the Fort. He left on July 19, 1857, and moved to the mouth of the Purgatoire where he built a stockade. He claimed title to the land through the Vigil-St. Vrain land grant.

In 1855 Governor Denver of Kansas established Arapaho County which extended north of the Arkansas river from the present Colorado-Kansas line to the mountains. This completely disregarded a treaty which Fitzpatrick had signed with the Indians in 1851.

In 1858 gold was discovered on the South Platte at Auraria and prospectors flocked to the site. The westward movement began in earnest. Pueblo was reestablished in

1858 or 1859, and Boulder was founded in 1858. In November the Cheyennes and Arapahos visited Bent and asked him to get the government to respect their lands. He wrote to A. M. Robinson, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis. Robinson was concerned and recommended to Washington that Bent be made Indian Agent. On April 27, 1859, President Buchanan signed his commission. Bent gave his son Robert, seventeen, the task of freighting the annuity goods to the Fort in 1859. But the Indians became more and more alarmed when more than sixty thousand prospectors came.

In Denver Wootton and St. Vrain brought trade goods and made a fortune. Wootton built a store; on the second floor W. N. Byers established Colorado's first newspaper. St. Vrain brought great quantities of goods. He came himself in the spring with whiskey, bacon, coffee, tobacco, shoes, and flour from his own mill in the San Luis Valley. He received forty dollars for a barrel of one hundred ninty-six pounds.

Wootton built a hotel in Denver but by 1861 he gave up the race and moved to a farm on the Fountain eight miles north of Pueblo. In June 1859 Doyle brought thirty thousand dollars worth of goods to his store in Denver. He was soon doing a business of half a million dollars a year and had stores also at Canon City, Pueblo and Tarryall.

In New Mexico St. Vrain built a flour mill at Mora and soon moved there. He entered the publishing business, publishing the Santa Fe Gazette. In 1858 he was made the public printer of the Territory.

Bent started eastward in September 1859. He met the Comanches and the Kiowas as Indian Agent at Walnut Creek but had no success in pacifying them. In St. Louis the next month he tended to his own business and hired a secretary to put a final polish to his Agency report. For the Indians he expressed an "exasperating sense of decay and impending extinction with which they are surrounded. A desperate war of starvation and extinction is imminent and inevitable, unless prompt measures shall prevent it." He recommended:

1. A new treaty in which the Indians must

cede towns and strips along the routes of travel.

2. Guarantees to respect their remaining lands must be carried out.

3. The Indians must be given instructions in farming methods at once.

4. Forts on the Arkansas must be replaced.

In February 1860 Bent returned to St. Louis. Forts were built at Fort Larned and Pawnee Fork. He asked twelve thousand dollars for his Big Timbers Fort but it was turned down.

In the midst of this turmoil back at his Fort he received word from Albert Boone that his daughter Mary was in love with a saloon keeper, Robison Moore. William dashed off to Westport to challenge his daughter, a Bent, even if she was half Indian, to marry a saloon keeper! After seeing Moore and learning he was a college graduate who was working in a saloon to keep alive between good jobs, he was favorably impressed with the young man and gave Mary away at a lavish wedding at his farm in Westport on April 3, 1860. He invited all his mountain men friends who were to be found.

In July 1860, three thousand Cheyennes, Arapahos and Apaches, but no Kiowas or Comanches, came to the Fort for their annuities. Sedgwick's troops captured the Sioux village of Chief Satanta but the chief escaped. His wife and children were captured and were given to Bent as hostages. Bent let them escape and sent Mark Ralfe down the Arkansas to report the escape to Sedgwick. The Kiowas caught Ralfe, shot him three times, stabbed him once and scalped him. The Cheyennes found him still alive and took him to the Fort where he miraculously recovered. Bent rented his Fort to the government for sixty-five dollars a month, which was never paid. He resigned as Indian Agent on September 19, 1860, and suggested Albert Boone as his successor. Bent went to the mouth of the Purgatoire and built a powerful ranch house. It was a square, one hundred feet on each side, with log pickets fifteen feet high and a foot in diameter. There were heavy beams on top. The rooms were sixteen by twenty feet.

Bent's rooms were on the north with warehouses and

employees' rooms on the west and south. On the east side were stables and a blacksmith's shop. Son Robert helped his father and Mary and her husband came with a grandchild to live with him. There were rich farmlands around and the family could build homes nearby.

The nation is at war

The Civil War came.

President Lincoln sent out a call for volunteers in April 1861. Few persons then realized the extent that the fighting would reach in a very short time. St. Vrain was in the process of shipping goods from St. Louis to Taos. We have a letter in which he wrote to John Francisco from Taos to Westport asking Francisco to get the goods on the way as quickly as possible. A quote would be appropriate from the copy now in the files of the Colorado State Historical Society. It is dated from Don Fernandez de Taos, April 29, 1861.

Mr. J. M. Francisco, Dear Sir:

I received a letter yesterday by the military express from Mr. Boone at Denver, by which we are informed, that he accepts our offer of eight waggons to freight his goods from Westport to Denver, at the usual rates of freighting as already understood. He writes that an agent of his has been gone some time to Saint Louis to purchase the stock of goods and will be about ready to load the same at Westport, when your train gets there. The most important of all now in regard to this matter is to start off the eight wagons soon and not loose any time. Marcelin is going up to settle his business and assist you in starting his train if you want him, and to come back here as soon as possible, to work in the store, in the absence of young (Theodore) Mignault who is going home to Canada.

Advices from an agent in Santa Fe in regard to our beef proposal, is that our price (10 cts. per pound on foot) was considered exhorbitant and not entertained. The highest bid from other

parties being 7 cts. You will of course sent your largest wagons.

Yours,
Ceran St. Vrain

The letter gives evidence that St. Vrain had business dealings with John Francisco, who, in 1862, built a fort with Henry Daigre at the present site of La Veta on land procured from St. Vrain.

St. Vrain was asked to organize the New Mexico Cavalry on August 16, 1861 but -- now a man fifty-nine years old -- he found the task too strenuous and turned it over to Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Carson on September 20.

It might be explained here that William Bent made things difficult for historians by giving his sons the same given names as his brothers.

In Westport George and Charles Bent (second generation) enlisted in the Confederate Army. The Bents in St. Louis were southern sympathizers. However, Frank Blair and Nathaniel Lyon secured the St. Louis arsenal for the Union. William Bent remained loyal to the Union and hauled freight for the Army to New Mexico. In early 1862 the Union forces under Chivington and Gilpin defeated the Texans at Glorieta Pass and the South made no further attempts to take New Mexico or Colorado. However, the South tried to woo the Indians who came to the Purgatoire to ask their trusted friend what to do. "A nod of his head would have created havoc." He advised the Indians to stay out of the white man's wars.

In Corinth in October 1862 George Bent (William's son) was captured and sent north to a prison camp in Missouri. As they passed through St. Louis a schoolmate recognized him and ran to inform Robert Bent who was in town on his father's business. Robert went to the military headquarters where many high-ranking officers knew William Bent. George was released if he would go west and fight no more; he returned to the Purgatoire ranch in early 1863. Charles had already returned but was sullen and full of hate. He ran off to join the Indians. George soon followed, and Julia, the youngest joined them with her half-blood husband, Edward Guerrier.

John Prowers, who had worked for Bent in 1857, brought a hundred head of cattle to the mouth of the Purgatoire and built himself a big house nearby. Tom Boggs, after spending five years with his father in California, returned to the Purgatoire in 1863 and brought several hundred head of cattle. Robert and Mary stayed with their father on the Purgatoire. Boggsville became a small settlement.

The citizens of Denver became alarmed at the Indian unrest and urged the Army to settle the issue. Chivington, the hero of Glorieta Pass, organized the troops and set out to find the Indians along the Arkansas. Bent urged Chivington to try to make peace, but Chivington said that he came to kill Indians, not to make peace. Then Bent tried the Indians and the Cheyennes came south to his call; George and Charles were with them. Bent urged his sons to come home. George yielded but Charles refused. When George learned the troops were coming, he returned to his people at Sand Creek where the Cheyennes had encamped with the understanding they would be protected by the Army.

Chivington assembled his hundred-day volunteers at Camp Fillmore, on the site of Booneville about twenty miles east of Pueblo. He stopped all communications down the river to prevent the Indians from learning he was coming. He marched down the Arkansas to Bent's ranch and kept William prisoner. William tried without avail to persuade Chivington to let him make peace. Chivington forced Robert Bent to guide the troops to Sand Creek, practically at the point of a gun, threatening to kill him if he mislead them.

The Cheyennes had camped at Sand Creek where the older chiefs urged the young braves to keep the peace, but the young ones moved northward toward Smoky Hill and were gone when the troops arrived early in the morning. The bedraggled troops fired on every Indian who appeared, without warning of any kind. Old Chief White Antelope stood holding the American Flag, declaring that it would protect them, when he was shot down. Many of the chiefs were killed in cold blood that day. The few braves who were still at the camp fought bravely but could not match the invading fire. Those who could fled north to Smoky

Hill. Bent's three children escaped with their lives but George was wounded in the hip.

Chivington was given a hero's welcome when he returned to Denver. But the truth leaked out soon about the massacre and in due time Chivington was condemned and dismissed in disgrace from the Army.

Advice was asked and ignored

Following the battle Bent and Carson, who was not near Sand Creek at the time, were asked to make recommendations for future policy. Bent stated to the investigating congressmen, "If the matter were left to me, I guarantee with my life that in three months I could have all the Indians along the Arkansas at peace without the expense of war." Carson, who was highly respected by the easterners, was asked what he thought of Bent's statment. He replied very quietly that Bent's suggestions agreed completely with his own, that no man had the confidence of the Indians more than William Bent. Their recommendations were ignored.

Indians fighting Indians continued. Some Pawnees killed five Cheyennes, including Yellow Woman. Bent learned of the tragedy when he saw his wife's scalp. Young Charles Bent, William's son, became the worst desperado on the plains. George finally came home, splitting with his younger brother. George helped assemble the Indians for another hollow treaty. Charles had a price on his head. William finally disowned him and Charles came home once with the intention of killing his father. William was away and Mary persuaded him to leave and give up such an idea. In 1868 Charles was wounded by a Pawnee, became ill and died.

St. Vrain advises Charles Bent's heirs

In 1859 Lucien Maxwell, owner of the largest land grant in history, next to St. Vrain, tried to keep Charles Bent's children from getting their inheritance of a portion of the Beaubien and Miranda (later the Maxwell) grant. On the advice of St. Vrain and Carson the children sued Maxwell. The courts went against Maxwell and he

bought out the children's interest for eighteen thousand dollars. Alfred Bent, son of Charles, was murdered in Taos on December 9, 1865. William Bent stepped in on behalf of his brother's children. Finally Maxwell himself had so many troubles with squatters that he sold out most of his land for six hundred and fifty thousand dollars in 1870. But the friendly old ties held up and Bent visited Maxwell at his Cimarron mansion. St. Vrain also stopped by.

Joseph Doyle, with his great ranch on the Huerfano purchased from St. Vrain in 1859, originally bought six hundred acres but soon enlarged it extensively to provide food for his numerous stores in Denver and across Southern Colorado. He was highly respected in the Territory and was elected to the Territorial Assembly in 1863. He moved to Denver from his ranch in January 1864 and died unexpectedly in March of that year. He was recognized as the richest man in Colorado Territory. His widow, Cruzita, died mysteriously in March 1865, the day before she was to marry Dick Wootton. Grandmother Teresita Suaso took the four children to Mora but brought them back to the ranch in 1867.

Wootton left his farm on the Fountain in April 1865 and took up land at the north end of Raton Pass. At his own great expense he built a toll road over the pass and collected several thousand dollars a year in tolls. In 1867 he married his fourth wife, Maria Paula Lujan, who was a cousin of his first wife Dolores. Maria gave him ten children. When Wootton died in 1893 he had outlived all but three of his twenty children.

Bent went to Washington in 1866-67 to try to sell his stone fort. The Army refused to purchase the Fort, even telling him that he had no right to the Fort since he did not own the land on which it rested. The Army also refused to pay any of the formerly agreed-upon rent.

Carson took a delegation of Utes to Washington the same year. When he returned he purchased two pieces of land from St. Vrain, one at the mouth of the Purgatoire next to the Bent ranch, and another piece some miles up the river. In 1867 he resigned from the Army and moved to Boggsville, site of his new land purchase. Here Josefa gave birth to her seventh child and died two weeks later.

Grief stricken, Carson was ill and was taken to Fort Lyon, across the Arkansas from his home. He died there a month later, on May 23, 1868. He had an opportunity to talk with William Bent and George Bent shortly before his death. Tom Boggs, a neighbor, became guardian of Carson's six small children.

The following year Bent started with a caravan from New Mexico toward Westport. On the way he came down the Timpas and saw the remains of his old Fort, now used as a stage station, across the Arkansas. When he reached his home on the Purgatoire his daughter put him to bed with pneumonia. He died on May 19, 1869, leaving an estate of about two hundred thousand dollars. He had taken caravans along the Santa Fe Trail at least once every year for about forty years. Undoubtedly William Bent knew the Indians better than any white man before or since his time. Where can one find a greater man in the West at this period of American history? He was a loyal citizen, loyal to his country, and loyal to his friends, both white and red.

Army continued slow-paying ways

St. Vrain lived the last years of his life at Mora, across the Sangre de Cristo Mountains from his beloved Taos. However, he continued to do business in his store at Taos, which was operated by Theodore Mignault. He supplied the Army at Fort Garland and at Fort Union. Sometimes he still had difficulty in getting paid upon delivery.

He wrote in a letter from Taos to John Francisco on June 29, 1864:

> Your letter of date June the 9th is received. I am now and have been so occupied with the mills and transportation of flour from point to point that it has been impossible for me or Mignault to absent ourselves. I am in hopes of him [being] able to go to Denver about the middle of July. I have been fortunate enough, to obtain payment for the herd of cattle delivered at Los Pinos, but not so fortunate

> with the flour, the Comissary being out of funds -- and has been since the middle of May, owing me a large amount, and the consequence is I am very hard pushed again. So soon however as I can obtain a settlement for the flour delivered, I will take a trip to the Arkansas, and Denver. I cannot conjecture for the present how to operate, as we don't know every moment what may happen the next moment, but when I will go over, I hope to be so fixed as to be able to tell what to do in the future. Very respectfully, Ceran St. Vrain.

He spent the years in Mora with his wife Louisa Branch. Records are inconclusive but he appears to have been married four times having one child by each wife. His oldest son, Vicente, inherited his property, which was very extensive. His will is in the Mora County Court House.

WILL of CERAN ST. VRAIN

> As man's life is uncertain and as I am about taking a trip of some risk across the plains, should I be so unfortunate as to be killed or die on my transit, it is my best wish that my son, Vicente St. Vrain and F. Mignault take charge of all my property in the Territory of New Mexico and Territory of Colorado and State of Missouri.
>
> lst. It is my wish that after all my just debts are duly paid out of my estate that a sum of five thousand dollars be set aside for the education of my daughter Felicitas and out of the Las Animas Grant when it is sold and everything settled that there be paid to A. M. St. Vrain five thousand dollars. And to F. Mignault five thousand dollars. My farm what is in the state of Missouri is to be sold and the proceeds to be divided say one half of proceeds to go to the heirs of my two brothers (deceased) Charles and Felix St. Vrain and the other half to be divided eaguely (sp) with my sons Vicente

and Felix St. Vrain and my daughter Felicitas St. Vrain. It is also my wish to be paid yearly to the mother of my daughter Felicitas St. Vrain as long as her good behavior three hundred dollars. It is my urgent wish that my (child) Felicitas be sent immediately to Vicente St. Vrain and for him and his wife Amelia to take charge of her and rase and educate her as if she was their own child. It is my urgent wish and I command it. That she be sent to the States to the convent (Catholic) until her education is complete. And in testimony whereof I have this April the 2nd in the year A. D. one thousand eight hundred and sixty six set my hand and sealed in presence of

Signed Ceran St. Vrain

Witnessed

Alfred A Crame, M.D.
Alexander Duvall
W. B. Shoemaker
W. Gilhurst

St. Vrain died at his home in Mora on October 28, 1870. His funeral was attended by more than two thousand persons in a ceremony which was noted as the most impressive ever held in New Mexico. He was buried with full military honors by the entire contingent of Fort Union. The Masonic Lodge was in charge of the funeral services and the funeral music. St. Vrain's grave lies on a lonely hillside about a quarter of a mile west of the Catholic cemetery in Mora. The cemetery is surrounded by a high, heavy gauge wire fence. On the east side there is an old iron gate that allows ingress to the cemetery. The place is neglected. Scrub oak and grass give it a gloomy appearance and atmosphere. The imposing monument which once stood over his grave is now fallen and broken into pieces and the grave is littered with trash betraying the evidence of vandalism. [The will and the description of the cemetery are to be found in a master's thesis

submitted to the New Mexico Highlands University of Las Vegas, New Mexico in June 1967 by Eugene J. Hanosh, who grew up in Mora.]

St. Vrain was born of a famous family into the French culture in St. Louis. He was very ambitious and successful in his business ventures, from his job at the Bernard Pratte company in his youth to his flour mill in Mora. He dealt in real estate, in the mercantile business, and in trapping and trading with the Indians. He freighted goods for the American government to the Army forts of the Southwest. He supplied prospectors of the gold rush to Denver.

Most significant for the present day is his receipt of the Mexican land grant of more than four million acres known as the Vigil-St. Vrain Grant. He was known from Fort Laramie to Chihuahua as an upright and honest trader, and as a gentleman.

The original grant, one of one hundred forty five land grants, but by far the largest, was conveyed to St. Vrain and to Cornelio Vigil, a justice of the peace and a prominent political figure of Taos, in December 1843. There is record of a deed of conveyance to Charles Bent of one sixth of the grant, signed at Taos on March 11, 1844, by Vigil and St. Vrain. In January 1847 Vigil was killed in the Taos revolt and the entire grant came to St. Vrain.

When New Mexico came under the jurisdiction of the United States by the Treaty of Guadelupe Hidalgo in 1848, there was a provision which guaranteed the property rights of all Mexican citizens. St. Vrain was technically a Mexican citizen since he had been naturalized in 1831 for the purpose of getting special privileges given only to Mexican citizens. The boundaries of the land grants were usually vague and the essential part of a grant was the water courses it included. Since the Mexican land grant system did not involve specific boundaries, it became very difficult to draw lines in the American style. In order to resolve ownership of the land the United States Congress created the office of Surveyor-General of New Mexico in 1854. The Surveyor-General examined the claims and submitted his recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior who forwarded it to the Congress for confirmation or rejection. Only a few land claims were processed

through this system. Congress approved only ninety-six thousand acres for the Vigil-St. Vrain grant on June 21, 1860. This was seriously disputed and Congress in an act of February 25, 1869, again limited the grant to ninety-six thousand acres. All during this period St. Vrain continued to make grants of land far in excess of the ninety-six thousand acres, feeling that Congress would eventually recognize them all.

In 1843 Governor Armijo made large grants of land to persons of means who could afford to settle the lands and thus hopefully to protect them from the encroachments of the Americans. It has been stated that these grants were the result of connivance and corruption. This seems doubtful. It is true that they were not made in strict conformance with the existing legal codes. However, these codes were changing with the independence of Mexico from Spain in 1821. The grants do carry out the intention of the law by validating the territorial possession and national sovereignty of Mexico. The great difference in these grants from earlier ones was their tremendous size. The original grant was supposed to be limited to eleven square leagues, or about forty-eight thousand acres, and these grants were sometimes well over a million acres.

Armijo grants were done under the laws of the Republic of Mexico which had been passed between August 18, 1824 and November 21, 1828. The laws state that the governor of a territory may entertain petitions for land from foreigners or native families or private persons, or from empresarios who contract with the central government to bring in foreign or native colonists. (It was under this latter provision that Texas was settled by the Anglo-Saxons.) None of Armijo's grants was an empresario grant. None went through the federal government in Mexico City.

As governor, Armijo was to investigate the character of the grantees and to determine whether the land was vacant and unclaimed. Then the Territorial Deputation (later the Assembly) was to approve the grant. Final title was not given, however, until the grantee had occupied and cultivated the land with a specified number of persons or families within a specified length of time. Otherwise he would lose the right to the land. No individuals could own more than eleven square leagues.

Petitions for grants describe valleys of certain rivers in which the grantees were to select parcels of irrigable land to assign to settlers. The rest of the land was undivided, with water, pasture and timber for the use of everyone. The grantees were Beaubien, Lee, Nolan and St. Vrain, all of whom were naturalized Mexican citizens who had lived and worked in New Mexico for from twelve to twenty years. They had served their country and also had the capital to finance settlements. These men understood the terms of the grants. The actual approval for the grants was written in the margins of the petitions by Armijo as well as by earlier governors. He then delegated responsibility for carrying out the laws to the alcalde or prefect of the popular jurisdiction. The alcalde marked the boundaries and gave possession of the land in an ancient ceremony of pulling weeds and loudly proclaiming ownership. They traveled around the boundaries building mounds at the corners. Most of these grants were not really approved by the assembly nor were there time limits or a number of settlers specified.

When the Americans came to settle the land claims most of them did not comprehend the very different approach to landholding between the Spanish-Mexican system and the American. To Mexicans, land which was undivided and unsettled was worthless. To Americans, land was property to be used for investment or sold for profit.

In 1854 Congress created the office of Surveyor-General of New Mexico. He was to examine the claim, submit his recommendation to the secretary of the Interior who forwarded the recommendation to Congress for confirmation or rejection. Local decisions on the claims for the Vigil and St. Vrain Grant were made by Irving W. Stanton and Charles A. Cook, the registrar and receiver of the Pueblo Land Office. In 1860 the Congress limited the four million, ninety-six thousand acres of the St. Vrain grant to ninety-six thousand acres. In 1869 the Congress amended this Act by requiring that all the claims be settled within a year. By 1870 there were thirty-nine claims to the St. Vrain grant totalling well over ninety-six thousand acres. Stanton and Cook acted favorably on thirteen claims totalling seventy-three thousand, two hundred fifty-one and fifty-five hundredth acres. The

claims of Eugene Leitensdorfer and twenty-two smaller claims totalling eighty-five thousand, nine hundred thirty-nine and ninety-eight hundredth acres were rejected.

Unfortunately St. Vrain died in 1870 in the middle of the proceedings and most of his grants were by word of mouth and not recorded.

Most of the accepted claims were located on the Huerfano River. They were recognized for Charles Autobees, Benjamin Field and William Kronig, Norton W. Welton, heirs of Joseph B. Doyle, Helen N. McCormick, William Craig, Henry W. Jones, George F. Streetor and George W. Schofield. A grant to Estefana Bent Hicklin on the Greenhorn was accepted. On the Cucharas a grant was given to John M. Francisco and Henry Daigre, and on the Purgatoire to the heirs of William Bent and to Rumalda Boggs. The remaining land of the grant became the property of the United States government and was later made available for homesteading.

Claims continued to be contested for many years concerning the many grants which have been inherited from Mexico. In 1891 Congress created the court of Private Land Claims. Five judges sat for thirteen years and heard more than three hundred claims covering about thirty-five million acres.

The name of St. Vrain is still found in connection with the St. Vrain Creek which empties into the South Platte north of Denver, and the St. Vrain Nuclear Power Plant which is located near the old Fort St. Vrain which was built by the Bent St. Vrain Company in 1837.

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